

## Introduction

The present issue of *Flusser Studies* is basically divided into two main sections. Section one includes two Flusser texts related to the work of Hannah Arendt and the concept of ‘apparatus’, an English translation of a section of Flusser’s *Vampyrotheutis infernalis* dealing with the meaning and function of the arts in a society of immaterial communication, as well as two ‘works in progress’: a play and a documentary devoted to the work and life of Flusser. Section two, on the other hand, consists of four essays taking up some of the themes of the first section, focusing on three major interconnected subjects: Flusser and the arts, continuing the research already undertaken in the last issue<sup>1</sup>, his concept of the apparatus, and his theoretical debt to Hannah Arendt.

In *A banalidade do mal*, written in the late 1960s, Flusser discusses Arendt’s concept of evil as she developed it in her book on Eichmann, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). Instead of focusing, however, on how mediocre individuals are able to commit horrendous crimes, as in the case of Adolf Eichmann, he reflects upon the fact that well-educated and refined people are capable of heinous but basically trivial acts of evil when being part of insignificant, that is, banal, apparatuses. In *La banalité du mal*, on the other hand, written shortly after Hannah Arendt’s death on the 4<sup>th</sup> December 1975, Flusser reflects upon his relationship with the philosophy of Arendt and its specific relevance for his concept of apparatus. The two texts are important both for the development of Flusser’s own concept of apparatus and for his relationship with Hannah Arendt, creating thus a thematic link to Oliver Brun’s and Rainer Guldin’s contributions in this issue.

This issue also includes the online premiere of “Bodenlos - Without Ground” directed by Bia Szva and performed by *Grupo de Teatro da Poli* (GTP) (SÃO PAULO, BRASILIEN). The play was performed in Berlin and Prague in 2009 and is shown here in its entirety on video. It attempts to explore in a humorous way the theatrical possibilities of Vilém Flusser’s life and work, using text fragments, real facts and anecdotes that surround this polemic thinker. The group chose the performance and an esthetic research on the word as a theatrical language to discuss the question of the uprooting, of the loss of firm ground and the feeling of being a foreigner in the world that was so important to the philosopher. *Flusser Studies* thanks Maurício Dwek and the *Grupo de Teatro da Poli* for the permission to present the video and to permit our readers access to their work.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare *Flusser Studies* 08, <http://www.flusserstudies.net/pag/archive.htm>

Besides the play “Bodenlos - Without Ground” this issue wants, furthermore, to draw attention to a recent enterprise by Chico Toledo and Maurício Dwek, the documentary “Caixa Preta” dedicated to Flusser’s life and works. A first theatrical trailer, that is going to be substituted by another one in the course of next year, is already available on the internet. In their essay “Black Box”, also included in this issue of *Flusser Studies*, the two authors present the main purposes of their project as well as their specific view of Vilém Flusser.

Anne Popiel’s excerpt from *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* marks the text’s first translation into English. In this excerpt from his hybrid fable of philosophical fiction, Vilém Flusser examines the history and future of human art and communication from the perspective of a giant deep-sea squid, the *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*. Flusser oscillates between an encyclopedic description of the animal’s anatomical and behavioral characteristics and a cultural history of human art making, proposing the world of the *Vampyroteuthis* as a model for human communication in the age of television, film and digital images.

In “The ‘End of Politics’ in the cultural Philosophy of Vilém Flusser”, the first essay of section two, Oliver Bruns tries to work out the political implications of Flusser’s thinking, linking it closely to Hannah Arendt’s thought. For Flusser, as well as for the political philosopher Arendt, Auschwitz presented a breach with the Western tradition. But, opposed to Arendt, Flusser states that the breach of tradition in a sense continues, and the renewal of the political space, considered possible by Arendt, becomes increasingly impossible with the impact of technical images. The forecast of the ‘death of the politics’ is explained by Flusser with the fact that a specific political difference, namely that of public and private space, has become fragile because of the communication revolution. To preserve the freedom and dignity of the human being in post-history, the lost balance of dialogue and discourse, according to Flusser, has to be restored and an ‘installation of the apparatus-totalitarianism’ has to be prevented.

Rainer Guldin’s “Golem, robot and other configurations. Vilém Flusser’s concept of the apparatus” attempts a systematic genealogic reconstruction of Flusser’s concept of the apparatus from Portuguese texts of the early 1960s up to the *Bochumer Vorlesungen*. The concept of apparatus is decidedly interdisciplinary in nature positioning itself on the border of philosophy, sociology, history, literature, the arts, cybernetics and technology, subsuming under the same heading the photographic camera, Kafka’s impenetrable bureaucratic apparatus and the perfectly operating apparatus of Auschwitz. Flusser combined different textual sources to fashion his view of the apparatus. Many of them stem directly from the history of Prague. Apart from Kafka’s novels and Karel Čapek’s *R.U.R.*, the figure of the Golem as it appears in the legend of Rabbi Löw would also have to be mentioned.

Steve Tomasula's "Emergence and Posthuman Narrative" focuses on the relevance of scale for narrative. The humanist novel, with its concern for individual autonomy, authenticity, and mimetic representation, is often designed to depict the world at the human scale of the every-day world, that is, the scale of face-to-face interaction. In a time when people increasingly understand the world at larger scales, however, the optical metaphor of the human scale may be less relevant to the architecture of the novel than one relying upon a much larger scale. By seeing emergence as an organizing principle in the architecture of novels, a radically new mode of narration complementing the contemporary post-human ground of being as well as the architecture of the humanist novel opens up. Tomasula's essay is particularly interesting in view of Flusser's own reflections on the relationship of word and picture, text and techno-image as well as his concept of techno-imagination<sup>2</sup> that he developed in the 1980ies and early 1990ies.

Marie-Anne Soyez' "Dear Flusser – Dear Don. Letters from 1973 to 1983", finally, is dedicated to the correspondence between Vilém Flusser and Donald L. Stacy that started in 1973 and ended in 1983. An intellectual and later also emotional friendship emerged from this exchange, prompted by an article Flusser published in the US journal *Main Currents of Modern Thoughts*. This exchange can also be read as a direct commentary on the relationship of image and word Flusser was developing at about the same time in his work.

Rainer Guldin

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<sup>2</sup> Compare Rainer Guldin, 'Iconoclasm and Beyond: Vilém Flusser's Concept of Techno-Imagination', in: *Studies in Communication Sciences*, Winter 2007, 7/2, p. 63-84 ([http://www.scoms.ch/current\\_issue/abstract.asp?id=351](http://www.scoms.ch/current_issue/abstract.asp?id=351)).